



News Release

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Mayor launches Seattle Step Ahead preschool program

Effort will help 280 4-year olds in southwest and southeast Seattle

SEATTLE — Mayor Greg Nickels launched a free preschool program today for 4-year-olds from low- to moderate-income families in southeast and southwest Seattle.

Seattle Step Ahead is the first major new program of the Early Learning Network, the City of Seattle's comprehensive approach to helping children get ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

The program is paid for by the Families and Education Levy, which Seattle voters overwhelmingly passed last fall. The levy funds after-school programs, school-based health centers, support for students at risk of dropping out of school, family involvement initiatives and preschools.

"We must make sure all Seattle preschool children enter kindergarten ready to learn," Nickels said as he unveiled the program's new name and logo. "Seattle Step Ahead Preschools will make a difference in the lives of hundreds of families and help us close the achievement gap in our schools."

Seattle Public Schools Superintendent Raj Manhas and dozens of other educators attended and participated in this morning's program at Tiny Tots' Step Ahead Preschool at Wing Luke Elementary, and children from the Jose Marti Step Ahead Preschool performed.

(more)

“Scientific research confirms what parents have known forever: that the earliest years of a child’s life are critical to developing the skills and the love for learning that lead to academic success,” said Patricia McInturff, director of the Seattle Human Services Department. “We hope every family living in southeast or southwest Seattle who doesn’t already have their 4-year old enrolled in preschool will consider applying for this program.”

Space is still available in the six Step Ahead preschools that have already opened. Three more schools will open in January. In all, free early childhood education will be provided to 280 4-year olds from low-income families in southwest and southeast Seattle this school year. Eventually, 700 4-year-olds will benefit annually from the program.

To be eligible for the new preschool program, families must live in Seattle and their child must have turned 4 by August 31, 2005. The program serves low-income families that earn too much money to be eligible for the federally-funded Head Start and the state-funded Early Childhood Education Assistance (ECEAP) programs. For instance, a family of four earning up to \$21,285 annually is eligible for Head Start or ECEAP, while a family of four earning \$21,286 to \$58,056 is eligible for the new program.

The new preschool program is one of the largest investments of the seven-year Families and Education Levy. The City of Seattle and the Seattle Public Schools will work together to assess the children’s progress and report program outcomes to the community. Other programs in the Seattle Early Learning Network offer family home visits, early childhood teacher training and compensation, and help for families in selecting and enrolling their children in kindergarten.

Overall, the new levy will invest \$116.8 million over seven years in Seattle children by supporting programs for early learning, family involvement in schools, after-school activities, student health, and helping youth at risk of dropping out of school. About \$26 million of that total will support early learning programs for children living in southeast and southwest Seattle.

For more information about Step Ahead — locations, eligibility and applications — call 206-386-1050.

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